

Against the social constructionist account of Japanese politeness

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Abstract

This paper examines Cook's analysis of Japanese politeness as an interactional achievement. Taking a social constructionist perspective, and counter to Ide's notion of discernment, Cook contends that social identities and social relationships are fluid, negotiated during the moment-by-moment unfolding of social interactions. Although such cases can exist, they are not the norm. Cook asserts that speakers are not mere observers of social norms, but, rather, active agents constructing their own social worlds. This too can be valid in certain situations. Examining speech-style shifts in professor-student consultations in Japanese universities, Cook claims that students exercise total freedom in selecting plain, non-honorific forms. This paper demonstrates that Cook's data do not support her claim. Students did not shift their speech to plain form in their dialogic mode of discourse. Her data support an analysis demonstrating students' awareness that an appropriate attitude in such a setting is to show deference to the advisor, and that this deference cannot be expressed without the use of honorifics. Speakers of Japanese are not as free in their linguistic behavior as Cook contends. Failure to observe the social norm of polite language (tameguchi) is frequently ridiculed and penalized. This fact demands acknowledgement of Ide's notion of discernment.

Keywords: honorifics, Japanese pragmatics, indexicality, politeness, social deixis, soliloquy, tameguchi

1. Introduction

This paper critically examines Cook's (2006, 2008a) analysis of the use of Japanese politeness conceived as an interactional achievement¹. Taking a social constructionist perspective, and counter to Ide's (1982,

1989) notion of discernment (*wakimae*), Cook contends that social identities and social relationships are fluid, and that they are constructed and negotiated during the moment-by-moment unfolding of social interaction. She considers speakers to be not mere passive observers of social norms, but, rather, active agents who construct their own social worlds. Viewed from this perspective, she concludes that Ide's dichotomy between discernment and volition is simply irrelevant.

Although insightful and thought provoking, Cook's data fail to support her claim. Rather, they suggest that discernment-based politeness is in fact operational.

The organization of this paper is as follows. The balance of this section summarizes the relevant portion of Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, and Ide's objection to it. Section 2 provides Cook's counter-argument to that of Ide, and Section 3 scrutinizes Cook's argument. Conclusions follow in Section 4.

1.1. Brown and Levinson's theory of politeness

Brown and Levinson's universal theory of politeness (1987: 1) postulates that politeness "presupposes that potential for aggression as it seeks to disarm it, and makes possible communication between potentially aggressive parties". In their conceptualization, politeness is thus a manifestation of the speaker's strategic choice of linguistic expressions in order to minimize the risk of incurring a *face-threatening act* (FTA). They posit two types of *face* as universal notions: negative and positive. *Negative face* is defined as "the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions be unimpeded by others," and *positive face* as "the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others" (1987: 62). They propose five strategies: (i) to do an FTA without redressive action, (ii) to use positive politeness, (iii) to use negative politeness, (iv) to go off the record, and (v) not to do an FTA. Speakers select according to their calculation of the seriousness of the FTA (*R value*), based on the social distance between the speaker and addressee, the relative power of the speaker and addressee, and the rank of imposition intrinsic to the FTA itself in a particular culture. The riskier the FTA, the higher the number of the politeness strategies speakers are likely to employ.

1.2. Ide's objections

The inadequacy of Brown and Levinson's theory in accounting for Japanese politeness phenomena has long instigated enthusiastic and

intense debates. Ide (1982, 1989), for example, criticizes their theory's exclusive handling of politeness as strategic moves to minimize the impact of an FTA, while totally neglecting what she claims to be socially obligatory linguistic choices. Ide argues that the purpose of the use of honorifics is not exclusively to save face, because honorifics occur even when there is no FTA². She uses the terms *volition* to refer to the strategically-motivated practice of politeness, and *discernment* to refer to the polite behavior of conforming to the culturally prescribed norm, which is "independent of the speaker's rational intention" (Ide 1989: 242). For her, volition-based politeness serves to save face, in accordance with Brown and Levinson, but discernment-based politeness is like a grammatical requirement, constituting a sociopragmatic concordance system. Thus, she argues, Brown and Levinson's theory, which deals with only one aspect of politeness, is incomplete. In Western society, she continues, volitional politeness prevails, but in Japanese society, discernment does so.

Ide et al. (1992) experimentally investigated Japanese and American notions of politeness: Japanese and American subjects were asked to associate ten adjectives with the most appropriate scene from fourteen interactional situations. They found that the American subjects tended to connect *polite* with *friendly*, whereas the Japanese subjects judged *teineina* (usually translated as 'polite') and *shitashigena* 'friendly' as distinct. Ide et al. offer these findings as evidence supporting their claim that American politeness is volition-based, whereas Japanese politeness is predominantly discernment-based.

2. Cook's counter-argument to discernment-based politeness

Subscribing to a social constructionist perspective, Cook (2006) argues that the dichotomy between discernment and volition is irrelevant, thus unnecessary. She claims that politeness is an interactional achievement. That which has previously been analyzed as discernment is "an active co-construction in which the grammatical structures and the sequential organization of talk serve as resources for the participants to construct their identities in the moment-by-moment unfolding of interaction" (Cook 2006: 269).

Cook identifies three assumptions underlying Ide's theory: (i) human actions are based predominantly on the agents' active choices in some societies, but on the passive observation of social rules in other societies; (ii) social identities are *a priori* determined in Japanese society; (iii) there is a one-to-one correspondence between honorific form and social status/rank (Cook 2006: 271).

From the social constructionists' point of view, Cook argues, these assumptions are untenable. Social identities are an emergent product of social interaction and, therefore, universally fluid, not *a priori* determined, as the concept of discernment presupposes. Every move the speaker makes is his/her own active choice, according to Cook. Consequently there is no such thing as passive observation of social rules as discernment.

Cook considers that the disagreement regarding the concept of discernment stems largely from assumption (iii) above. As Watts (2003) points out, most linguistic structures do not directly index politeness. Nevertheless, Cook contends, many researchers – e. g., Ide (1982, 1989), Ide et al. (1992), Fukada and Asato (2004) – assume a one-to-one mapping between the so-called Japanese “addressee honorific” *masu* and negative politeness afforded the addressee. *Masu* should be regarded as multifunctional, indexing different social identities and/or social activities (Cook 1998; S. Okamoto 1999). Cook asserts that *masu* indexes the speaker's self-presentational stance, and that politeness to the addressee is only one of the situational meanings arising in some social contexts³.

Cook then examines speech-style shifts between the *masu* and plain (non-honorific) forms during Japanese university academic consultation sessions; a prototypical situation in which discernment has been claimed to be required due to the clearly-defined difference in social status between professor and student⁴.

According to Cook, her data exhibit, contrary to what the discernment account predicts, both professor and student shifting between the *masu* and plain forms. Employing linguistic forms as well as sequential organizations of talk as resources, she emphasizes, the professors and students jointly construct multiple social relationships.

While insightful and persuasive in many respects, Cook's conclusion appears oversimplified and a non-sequitur. In the next section, her argument is re-examined and demonstrated unable to withstand scrutiny.

3. Cook's argument scrutinized

3.1. Nonreciprocal exchanges

To support her argument, Cook provides conversation segments from academic consultation sessions between professors and their students. (Following Cook's convention, in the following, the *masu* form is in **bold**, and the plain form is underlined. The English translations of her data are hers.)

(1) (= Cook's (3) in 2006, (5) in 2008a. *P* stands for a professor, and *S* for a student.)

- 1 P: *nani ka shitsumon arimasu ka*
 'Do you have any questions?'
 2 S: *eeto* ((turning the pages of the book))
 'We:ll'
 3 → P: *koko made de [wakannakatta tokoro toka soo iu no nakatta?*
 'Up to this point, isn't there anything that you didn't understand?'
 4 S: [((coughs))
 5 → P: *eego wa muzukashiku nakatta?*
 'Wasn't the English difficult?'
 6 → S: *atta* – ((laughs)) *atta to omou n desu kedo chotto*
 'There were – I think there were (questions).'

In line 1, the professor asks the student in the *masu* form, but in lines 3 and 5, resorts to the plain form. The student nevertheless responds in the *masu* form in line 6. This type of nonreciprocal exchange has frequently been explained by discernment: while the superior can talk in the plain form, the subordinate must maintain the *masu* form to show deference. Cook declares this explanation to be unconvincing because the subordinates – students in her data – do not always mark such a hierarchical relationship linguistically with *masu*. She argues that interlocutors select either the *masu* or the plain form to co-construct their social relationship as the conversation unfolds. In (1), the professor selected the plain form, and the student the *masu* form. By so doing, they co-constructed a hierarchical relationship. Cook writes (2006: 278): “In a dyadic interaction such as an academic consultation session, once the professor comes to a transition relevance place in his turn marked in the plain form, the student, who is expected to take the next turn ..., can choose either the *masu* or the plain form and co-construct a particular type of relationship with the professor⁵.”

Despite this unique and bold claim, her data fail to provide any definitive examples of students' intentional moves from the *masu* to the plain form. This problem will be discussed shortly.

3.2. Incomplete sentences

Cook (2006: 282) further contends: “When the professor shifts to the plain form, grammatical structures and the organization of talk serve as resources for the student to strategically avoid creating an unequal status. These strategies are: i) the use of an incomplete sentence, which

avoids marking either the *masu* or plain form; ii) embedding the professor's plain form utterance by co-construction."

Let us now examine the use of an incomplete sentence, which is, in principle, ambiguous as to whether the speaker would have otherwise completed it with the *masu* or with the plain form. Cook argues that, because incomplete sentences obscure the institutional hierarchy and do not subject the student to being lower in status, they serve as strategic resource if a student wishes not to interactionally commit him/herself to a particular social relationship. She provides several examples involving incomplete sentences:

(2) (= part of Cook's (6) in 2006, (12) in 2008a)

5 P: *hyaku nijuu hachi peeji made wa yonda?*
'Have you read up to page 128?'

6 S: *hai*
'Yes.'

7 P: *hu:n. muzukashikatta desho.*⁶ [*muzukashiku nakatta?*]
'Um: it was difficult, wasn't it? Wasn't it difficult?'

8 S: [*muzukashii iya: kotchi yori wa*]
'Difficult. No, seem like more

9 → *yomiyasukatta yoo na*
readable than this.'

In line 7, the professor asks in the plain form (*muzukashiku nakatta*) whether the reading assignment was difficult. To respond to this question, the student employs an incomplete sentence (*yomiyasukatta yoo na*). The complete version would be *yomiyasukatta yoo na ki ga suru/shimasu* 'I feel that it is easier to read'. Cook ascertains that by not completing the sentence, the student does not define the relationship with the professor.

The question arises here as to whether this incomplete expression is actually ambiguous. That is, whether or not the student would have possibly completed his utterance in the plain form (e. g., *yomiyasukatta yoo na ki ga suru yo*). If he had done so, the professor, as well as bystanders, would have certainly regarded him as immature, i. e., not fully a competent language user sociopragmatically. If an incomplete expression cannot naturally be completed in the plain form by sociopragmatically competent speakers, then there is no ambiguity involved. The utterance is *de facto* deemed an incomplete sentence otherwise ending in the *masu* form.

Cook's second example of an incomplete sentence is found in the following segment. Here the professor asks the student where she lived in the past.

(3) (= Cook's (7) in 2006, (13) in 2008a)

- 1 P: *doko ni sundeta n desu ka*
 'Where did you live?'
 2 S: *e::to umare wa oosaka no sakai-shi na n desu kedo:*
 'Uh I was born in Sakai-city, Osaka.'
 3 P: *u::n*
 'uh huh'
 4 S: = *sore kara sugu okinawa ni tenkin ni na- [narima-*
 'Then soon (my father) was transferred to Okinawa.'
 5 P: *[sore ikutsu gurai*
no toki?
 'How old were you?'
 6 → S: *sore moo honto ni issai ni natta ka[naranai ka gurai de*
 'That was about just when I was almost one or so.'
 7 P: *[hu::n okinawa*
 'Um Okinawa.'
 8 S: *hai*
 'Yes.'

In line 6, the student ends her turn with *de*, a nonfinite form of the copula *da*. Cook asserts that the student could have completed the sentence either in the *masu* form (*deshita* 'was') or in the plain form (*datta* 'was') to co-construct a particular relationship with the professor, but she chose not to do so.

Here again, if the student had indeed completed her utterance with *issai ni natta ka naranai ka gurai datta yo* (plain form), one would most likely have doubted her sociopragmatic competence. Therefore, the incomplete sentence in (3) is, likewise, *de facto* unambiguous; the speaker's intention is assumed as employing the *masu* form.

3.3. Consideration of subordinate status

Another issue for consideration is whether the students (all at BA or MA levels) in Cook's data really wish to claim equal status with their professors in academic consultation. There seems no advantage for students to be considered (academically) equal with their professors. In fact, being subordinate in Japanese society is not always disadvantageous.

Japanese society is often characterized as *hierarchical*. This involves vertical stratification by an institution or group of institutions, rather than horizontal stratification by class or caste; each group is vertically organized based on the relationships between paternalistic superiors

and their subordinates (Nakane 1970). Such a society assumes loyalty from below and benevolence from above. Underlying this vertical society is said to be the Japanese societal trait called *amae* ‘dependence/indulgence’ (Doi 1973). *Amae* consists of “the feelings that normal infants at the breast harbor toward the mother – dependence, the desire to be passively loved, the unwillingness to be separated from the warm mother-child circle and cast into a world of objective ‘reality’” (“Foreword” by John Bester in Doi 1973: 7). This attitude of dependence is reportedly carried into adulthood, and dependence on others’ benevolence is encouraged during the socialization processes of the Japanese (DeVos 1985: 165). This type of dependency is considered to occur in most group settings: subordinates, who play the child role, can seek dependence on their superior, and the superior, who plays the parent role, is expected to display benevolence (Yoshino 1992: 18). Therefore, it would be more beneficial for students in an academic setting to emphasize their inequality and obtain more support from their professors. In fact, clever advisees intentionally emphasize this distinction and constantly remind the advisor of his/her obligations, i. e., to work for his/her students’ benefits.

3.4. *Tameguchi*

There are native speakers of Japanese, mostly young people, who do not observe the conventionalized usage (i. e., discernment) of the *masu* form. Such linguistic behavior is so marked that there is a special term coined for it: *tame-guchi* ‘fifty-fifty language’. The result of the first 20 pages of Google search as of August 12, 2011 for *tameguchi* reveals that it induces overwhelmingly negative reactions. For example, an individual seeking advice at an Internet site complains that a new employee at a nursing home does not stop using *tameguchi* to the aged residents because s/he believes it conveys psychological closeness⁷. Almost all responses to this post indicate that *tameguchi* is inappropriate and does not work positively to build rapport with the elderly. In fact, it is so inappropriate that *tameguchi* is exploited in many comedy shows. For example, consider this skit entitled *Tameguchi@robii* ‘*tameguchi* at a hotel reception desk⁸’:

(4) (G: guest; R: receptionist; A: audience)

- 1 G: *ano: suimasen watashi yoyaku shitain desu kedo heya-tte aitemasu kane*
 ‘Excuse me, I’d like to make a reservation. Do you have a room available?’

- 2 R: *kyoo?*
‘Today?’
- 3 G: *hai*
‘Yes.’
- 4 R: *kyoo wa moo umatteru kara naa*
‘It’s all booked for today.’
- 5 G: *a so ka n:to kyuu na shutchoo de dokomo aitenakute komat-
terun **desu** yo:*
‘Really? I’m on a business trip on short notice and can’t find
a hotel.’
- 6 R: *nanpaku yotee?*
‘How many nights?’
- 7 A: ((laughter))
- 8 G: *ano 1-paku nan **desu** kedo*
‘Well, just one.’
- 9 R: *nannin?*
‘How many are you?’
- 10 G: *ano hitori **desu***
‘Eh, one.’
- 11 R: *ja shinguru ga ii yo ne*
‘Well then you want a single room, don’t you?’
- 12 A: ((laughter))
- 13 G: *soo-**ssu** ne*
‘That’s right.’
- [snip]
- 14 R: *a tsuin no heya nara aiteru kedo doo suru?*
‘Oh, there’s a twin room available. How about that?’
A: ((laughter))
- 15 G: *a:: tsuin ka tsuin doo shi-*
‘Oh, a twin room. Well, what shall I’
- 16 *e 1-paku ikuragurai **desu** ka*
‘How much is the charge for one night?’
- 17 R: *1-paku 1-man 2-sen en*
‘¥12,000 per night.’
- 18 G: *1-man 2-se kekkoo suru naa*
‘¥12,000 ... Well, it’s a little too expensive.’
- 19 R: *demo soko shika aitenai yo:*
‘But that’s the only room available.’
- 20 A: ((laughter))

The guest (a young man) uses the *masu* form, except in line 17. By contrast, the receptionist (a young woman) uses the plain form exclusively. This usage is blatantly out of place and induces laughter from

the audience. (The reason why the audience does not laugh to the utterance in line 4 will be explained shortly.) Eventually, the guest becomes angry and demands to know why hotel employees speak to him in *tameguchi*. They, including the manager, have no clue why the guest is angry and try to assuage him, in *tameguchi*. The guest then becomes even angrier.

It is not possible for this episode to be humorous if the hotel employees are in fact considered to be allowed to negotiate and redefine their relationship with guests. It also illustrates the difference between languages with fossilized politeness (e. g., Japanese) and those without (e. g., English). It is extremely difficult to make this conversation funny in English. This fact supports Ide's claim that these two types of language have different characteristics in term of linguistic politeness. The *tameguchi* phenomenon introduced in this section clearly indicates that what Ide calls *discernment* still prevails in Japanese society. Thus, those who deviate from this norm are often ridiculed and penalized.

3.5. *The commonality of incomplete sentences in Japanese conversation*

One might wonder, if it is not to avoid acknowledging the social hierarchy, what then is the motivation of the students in Cook's data for leaving sentences incomplete. In Japanese conversation, incomplete sentences are common practice, even when interlocutors wish to maintain a hierarchically different or equal relationship. The following example is derived from an Internet talk show with four participants: a host and three guests⁹.

(5) (H: host; A: audience; G: guest)

- 1 H: *e:: 1-nen-han tsuzukete mairimashita ga, kyoo ga saishuu-kai ni natchaimashita*
'Well, this show has been broadcast for a year and a half, but we have the last show today.'
- 2 A: ((laughter))
- 3 H: *ma sore wa tomokaku desune*¹⁰
'That's put aside'
- 4 *e: kono bangumi kazukazu no chishikijin no kata toojoo-shite itadakimashita keredomo*
'We've had many intellectual people as guests'
- 5 *ma boku kara shitemireba desune*
'from my point of view'

- 25 → G1 *iya watashi wa kono 3-nin ga koo sorotta-tte hajimete*
 ‘Well, for me, it’s the first time to see these three together.’
- 26 H: *a soo desu ka*
 ‘Oh, is that so?’
- 27 G2: = *iya soo demo nai desho*
 ‘No, I don’t think so.’
- 28 *datte Saizoo de*
 ‘because we met together for *Saizo*’
- 29 → G3: = *M3 yatte*
 ‘We got together for the article entitled *M3*’
- 30 G1: *a soka*
 ‘Oh, that’s right.’
- 31 → G2: = *M3 de*
 ‘For *M3*’
- 32 G1 = *M3 ka*
 ‘That’s right, *M3*.’
- 33 *are totte irai ya na*
 ‘Since we did that.’
- 34 → *nannen mae are-tte*
 ‘How many years ago?’
- 35 → G3: *iya daibu mae dakedo*
 ‘Well many years ago.’

In this talk show series, the host uses the *masu* form exclusively. Apparently, he has no intention of linguistically negotiating and redefining the relationship with his guests. Nevertheless, he occasionally employs incomplete sentences, e. g., lines 6, 12, and 24. Such incomplete sentences would unambiguously be judged by fluent Japanese speakers as finishing in the *masu* form had they been completed.

The three guests are of equal status and freely use the plain form. However, because they are in a public talk show and because the topics discussed are mainly drawn from serious Japanese politics, they also use the *masu* form. Regardless of speech styles, they sometimes conclude their turns with incomplete sentences, e. g., lines 11, 25, 29, 31, 34, and 35.

As exemplified by this conversation, incomplete sentences are utilized in Japanese in all kinds of interactions, even when the interlocutors have no intention of negotiating or altering their social and/or psychological relationships with the addressee(s). This fact alone significantly attenuates Cook’s argument advocating that interlocutors are constantly renewing their relationships with respect to their relative social statuses by using incomplete sentences that obscure their status differences.

3.6. Co-construction

Cook asserts that students in her data sometimes change a potential hierarchical relationship to that of a mutually equal relationship by co-constructing a sentence with the professor¹².

the plain form indexes social meaning only when it occurs in the main clause, in which it contrasts with the *masu* form. In the subordinate clause, it normally does not contrast with the *masu* form. Thus, the current speaker's utterance ending with the plain form can be embedded in a clause ending in the *masu* form in the next speaker's turn. (2006: 284)

Using the following segment, she illustrates this point.

(6) (= part of Cook's (8) in 2006, (14) in 2008a)

- 1 S: *de ano sotsuron dasu toki wa komakaku settee shinaide*
'And uh when I submit the BA thesis, without setting details'
- 2 P: = *narubeku oomaka ni shitoita hoo ga ii yo ne*
'it is better to leave it in a rough frame, isn't it?'
- 3 → S: = *desu yo ne*
'isn't it?'
- 4 P: *un o- o- oosakaben to suru no ka oosaka hoogen suru ka kansai hoogen ni suru ka tte iu koto arimasu keredo*
'uh there is a problem of whether (we call) the thesis Osaka dialect, Osaka regional dialect, or Kansai regional dialect.'

According to Cook, lines 1–3 form co-construction of a sentence. In line 2 the professor completes the preceding student's sentence by using the plain form, *narubeku oomaka ni shitoita hoo ga ii yo ne* 'it is better to leave it in a larger frame, isn't it?' And the student makes the professor's utterance embedded in line 3, as schematically represented in (7).

(7) (= Cook's (8a) in 2006, (14a) in 2008a)

[[*narubeku oomaka ni shitoita hoo ga ii*]_{prof} *desu yo ne*]_{student}
'It is better to leave it in a rough frame, isn't it?'

Cook (2006: 286) goes on to assert: "In other words, the student's *desu yo ne* 'isn't it?' frames the professor's plain-form utterance and as a result, the co-constructed utterance ends with the *masu* form. Since the plain form in the non-final position in a sentence does not index any

social meaning, the student's *desu yo ne* changes a potentially hierarchical relationship to a mutually professional one."

What is unrepresented in (7) is the fact that the professor did complete his utterance in the plain form with the sentence-final particle, *yo*. If Cook's above analysis were valid, the student's act would be rather aggressive, amending the professor's utterance, analogous to what mothers might do with their children, as shown in my constructed example in (8).

(8) (R: a relative; C: child; M: mother)

- 1 R: *aki-chan moo shoogakusee ni natta no?*
'Aki, are you in elementary school?'
- 2 C: *un, natta*
'Yeah, I am [plain].'
- 3 → M: = *narimashita*
'I am [polite].'

The flow of the conversation in (6) does not suggest this much assertiveness on the part of the student. Rather, it is more reasonable to interpret line 3 as an elliptical sentence of [*soo*] *desu yo ne* 'I think so, too'.

3.7. Lack of genuine *masu-* to plain-form shifts

Throughout her articles, Cook claims that at a TRP, students had an opportunity to co-construct a type of a relationship with the professor by means of linguistic devices, and that they indeed spoke in the plain form to avoid a hierarchical relationship. However, none of her data demonstrates genuine shifts from *masu* to plain-form. Most of her examples merely make use of incomplete sentences which are unlikely to be interpreted as ending in the plain form.

Marginal cases can be observed in the next example:

(9) (= part of Cook's (5) in 2006)

- 8 P: *dakedo purote- ano: kurisuchan ga*
'But (in Korea) Prot- uh Christians are'
- 9 S: = *hai*
'Yes.'
- 10 P: *sanwari[sukunaku tomo sanwari tte iu koto wa nippon no ip-
paasento ni mitanai*
'3 [30] % at least 3 [30] %. That means compared with Japanese Christians which are less than 1%.'

- 11 S: *[so sanwari*
 ‘yes, 3 [30] percent.’
- 12 P: *ano: kurisuchan no kazu to hon: toni kurabemono ni naranai*
kurai[kirisutokyoo ga
 ‘(in Korea) the number of Christians’
- 13 → S: *[ooi*
 ‘large.’
- 14 P: *shinja ga ooi*
 ‘(the number of) believers is much larger.’
- 15 *naze na no ka tte omoshiroi shitsumon da to omoimasu yo*
 ‘why that is so is an interesting question, I think.’
- [snip]
- 18 S: *boku wa yappa sono uchi no ja: seeji to shuukyoo toka*
nanka yappa
 ‘among these (factors) I (will study) politics and religion
 sort of.’
- 19 *sore demo mada hiroi n desu kedo*
 ‘Still (that) is still broad but.’
- 20 P: *un*
 ‘uh huh’
- 21 → S: *hitotsu ni shika: shiborenai. hitotsu ni shibotte yaru shika nai*
 ‘I can only focus on one. There is no other way than focusing
 on one.’
- 22 P: *hai*
 ‘Yes.’

In line 13, the student anticipates the professor’s utterance and says *ooi* ‘numerous’ in the plain form. The student begins his utterance at a TRP, but because the professor continues his turn, the student overlaps with the professor, as they co-construct the utterance. This instance of the plain form does not sound like a complete sentence. Contrary to Cook’s contention, if the student had continued his utterance, it would have likely ended in the *masu* form (*ooi n desu*).

In line 19, the student uses the *masu* form, but shifts to the plain form in line 21. Cook explains that this utterance is in what Maynard (1991, 1993) refers to as “naked” style. The relevant function of the naked plain form here is to express “internal thought self-reflecting, including almost self-addressed utterance and monologues, making it possible to shun oneself from the addressee” (Maynard 1993: 179). It is crucial here to examine in detail how this dialogue-to-monolog shift functions.

3.8. Metapragmatic shift

Hasegawa (2010) contends that a shift such as exemplified by line 21 in (9) is not a normal speech-style shift, but, rather, a *metapragmatic* one, and that the motivation for using it is compensation for the defective paradigm of the Japanese honorific system. In the Japanese honorific system, the *masu* form is employed when the speaker considers the addressee psychologically distant, and/or the speaker wishes to exalt (i. e., honor, show respect for) the addressee¹³. Linguistically, addressees are dichotomized into (i) distant and exalted, and (ii) intimate and not exalted¹⁴. The use of the *masu* form is the norm in situation (i), whereas the plain form is used in (ii). In the (B) situation below, the speaker considers the addressee psychologically distant but exaltation superfluous; therefore, the plain form is typically used, and the speech might sound vulgar or impolite, e. g., *dare da* ‘Who are you?’

Addressee	Intimate	Distant
Exalted	(A)	(i) <i>Masu</i> Form
Not Exalted	(ii) Plain Form	(B)

A serious problem occurs in the (A) situation, when the speaker wishes to convey intimacy and deference simultaneously, because in the Japanese honorific system, these two affective stances are morphologically incompatible. In fact, this is quite possibly a universal problem, as seen in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) analysis of addressing terms. They consider non-intimate expressions as polite; that is, politeness is defined as an opposite notion of intimacy. Nevertheless, intimacy and deference are not inherently incompatible, and at times, we will certainly wish to articulate both stances toward the addressee.

Generally, honorifics index a sense of deference, but they can also be interpreted as unfriendly, standoffish, haughty, or rejecting. The plain form could be interpreted as conveying one’s trust, intimacy, etc., but it might alternatively be interpreted as too familiar and disrespectful (recall *tameguchi*). Therefore, simultaneous expression of both respect and intimacy requires highly elaborate linguistic skills. Hasegawa claims that the most prominent strategy to express intimate exaltation simultaneously in Japanese is the use of embedded soliloquy, as exemplified in (10–11):

(10) (FH: female, higher status; FL: female, lower status)

- 1 FH: *honto ni eego de wa kuroo shimasu*
 ‘English sure is a pain in the neck!’

- 2 FL: *eee, honto desu kaa?*
 ‘Oh, really?’
 3 FH: *honto, honto*
 ‘Yeah, that’s true.’
 4 → FL: *hee, sensee demo soo nan daa*
 ‘Hmm, even teachers have trouble with it.’

(11)

- 1 FL: *kore, saikin kekkoo hayatterun desu*
 ‘These [a pair of gloves] are kind of popular nowadays.’
 2 FH: *ara, kawaii. Doo mo arigatoo gozaimasu*
 ‘Oh, they’re cute. Thank you very much.’
 3 FL: *ookisa, daijobu desu ka?*
 ‘Is the size right?’
 4 FH: *choodo mitai*
 ‘It looks just right.’
 5 → FL: *aa, yokatta*
 ‘Oh, good.’

In line 4 of (10) and line 5 of (11), the speakers of lower status use the plain form. However, these utterances are under normal circumstances considered to be not dialogic, addressing to the FH, but soliloquial. Morphosyntactically, soliloquy does not include interactional devices, or addressee-oriented elements, e. g., (a) certain sentence-final particles (e. g., *yo* ‘I tell you’), (b) directives (e. g., commands, requests, questions), (c) vocative expressions (e. g., *oi* ‘hey’), (d) responses (e. g., *hai* ‘yes’, *iie* ‘no’), (e) pragmatic adverbials of various sorts (e. g., *sumimasen ga* ‘excuse me, but’, *koko dake no hanashi dakedo* ‘it’s between you and me’), (f) hearsay expressions (e. g., *(da)sooda/(da)tte* ‘I hear’), and (g) addressee honorifics (e. g., *desu/masu*) (Hasegawa 2010: 159–160). Furthermore, soliloquy normally lacks an overt grammatical subject. If a subject is overtly present, it frequently lacks *wa* (topic marker) or *ga* (nominative marker), e. g., (12).

- (12) *ano hito daijobu kana*
 ‘I wonder if that man is all right.’

As for positive indicators of soliloquy, Hasegawa lists the so-called exclamatory interjections (e. g., *waa, maa, hee, huun*) and exclamatory sentence-final particles (e. g., *naa, kana, ya*), as exemplified in (13).

- (13) a. *waa sugoi*
 ‘That’s great’
 b. *honto kanaa*
 ‘It may not be true.’
 c. *maa ii ya*
 ‘(reluctantly) This’ll do ...’

Soliloquy supposedly expresses one’s private thoughts, and revealing one’s private thoughts is to be interpreted as a sign of trust, loyalty, or psychological closeness. It should be noted that not all soliloquial utterances can serve to express intimate exaltation. The addressee’s territory of information (Kamio 1994) must be strictly honored¹⁵. Thus, soliloquy for intimate exaltation is limited to information that falls completely within the speaker’s territory and not in the least within the addressee’s territory. Typically, the content of soliloquy refers to the speaker’s mental state, e. g., (13a). Naturally, an utterance like (13b) that doubts the addressee’s previous statement does not serve to this end, nor do sulky remarks, e. g., (13c).

Recall Conversation (4). Line 4, *kyoo wa moo umatteru kara naa* ‘It’s all booked for today’, although in the plain form, does not induce laughter from the audience. This is because the audience judged this utterance as soliloquy due to the exclamatory sentence-final particle, *naa*, and thus it is not in *tameguchi*. This skit’s hotel guest consistently uses the *masu* form, except line 18, *1-man 2-se kekkoo suru naa* ‘¥12,000 ... Well, it’s a little too expensive’. Again, this is deemed as soliloquy so that he does not shift his speech style from the *masu* to the plain form.

S. Okamoto (1999) also points out such a use of soliloquy. In her conversation data between a 38-year old male professor and a 23-year old female graduate student, the latter occasionally employs the plain style. Okamoto asserts (the translations here are Okamoto’s):

she [the graduate student] used plain forms mostly for exclamatory remarks (e. g., *Aa sugoi* [Oh, wow!] ... *A, honto da* [Oh, that’s true] ...) or for soliloquy-like remarks (e. g., *Ue no hito nan ja nai ka naa* [I wonder if (I guess) he is the highest] ...). That is, for certain types of speech acts, eliminating formality is considered appropriate. (p. 62)

The professor also mixes the plain and *masu* forms, but, Okamoto remarks, his uses of the plain form are not restricted to soliloquy. An insertion of soliloquy into a conversation can reconcile the psychological distancing that necessarily accompanies the *masu* style.

Recognition of a particular indexical meaning need not be based on a single linguistic expression; rather, it is more likely dependent on such an expression in relation to its co-text and context. What is relevant to the strategy at hand is not soliloquy *per se*, but its appearance as a speech style shift. Furthermore, a set of linguistic expressions more likely indexes a multiplicity of socio-cultural dimensions (Ochs 1996). It cannot be presupposed that certain linguistic features always index certain sociocultural meanings. Notice, in this light, that the plain speech style indexes not only the affective dimensions and, in turn, a (positive) polite attitude, but it can also index the soliloquial mode of discourse so long as it does not contain any interactional devices. Therefore, this intimate exaltation strategy is a rather natural consequence of the multiple indexical potential of plain speech style.

This metalinguistic shift between dialogue and soliloquy must be kept separate from genuine speech style shifts *within* a dialogue, e. g., illustrated by the following episode from N. Okamoto (1997: 42). These utterances were made by a teacher in an elementary-school third-grade classroom.

(14)

- 1 *hai, dewa, empitsu oite kudasa:i*
'Well, then, put down your pencils.'
- 2 *sorede, mada kakete nakutemo, tochuude ki ga tsuitara ne, happyoo sureba iin desu kara ne*
'And if you haven't finished underlining, that's okay; if you notice something, you can say it at that point.'
- 3 *Ii desu ka*
'Okay?'
- 4 *hai, ja:, mazu ne, sen o hippatta tokoro kara happyoo shite mo-raima:su*
'Well, first, please recite from the places you underlined.'
- 5 *hai, ja:, sen hippatta hito, te o agete kudasa:i*
'Those of you who have underlined something, raise your hands.'
((After wiping away her perspiration))
- 6 → *atsusa ni makezu ni gambaroo ne*
'Let's not let the heat get (the better of) us!'
- 7 *hai, ja:, Miya Yutaka-san, onegai shima:su*
'All right, Yutaka Miya-san, please tell us your results.'

In (14), the teacher's utterances are all in the *masu* form, except line 6, which should be taken as her personal friendly encouragement, rather than a routine classroom direction. N. Okamoto analyzes that

the *masu* form indexes social identity, representing statements based on one's role as a teacher or as a student (i. e., public statements). On the other hand, the plain form, e. g., line 6, conveys that the statement is made as a private person (i. e., private statements), not based on one's official role. Here, the mode of discourse is fixed at dialogic, providing an example of a speech style shift proper, indexing a change in one's social identity, from teacher role to private person. Because such an utterance is not soliloquial, interactional expressions can be freely employed.

3.9. *Cook's data revisited*

In her data, the students' utterances clearly ending in the plain form are more appropriately analyzed as involving a metapragmatic shift from dialogic to soliloquial mode of discourse. In order to make her argumentation convincing, she would need to present a natural sounding utterance by a sociopragmatically competent student utilizing the plain form which includes an interactional device, so that it cannot be interpreted as soliloquy.

Such an utterance is conceivable between a student and his/her professor in a socializing setting. For example, after a professor's *karaoké* performance, a student might say:

- (15) *sensee, yokatta yo. jiin to kita yo*¹⁶
 'Professor, it was great! I was touched.'

Here, this hypothetical student's motivation for using the plain form is to express his/her psychological closeness, or, as Cook might put it, to construct an equal relationship with his/her professor. However, such an utterance is highly unlikely to occur during an academic consultation.

The possibility of utterances like (15) indicates that Cook's claim can be valid under certain circumstances. That is, interlocutors might indeed negotiate their social relationships at each conversational turn. One salient example occurs when the interlocutors are unfamiliar with each other and without a pre-defined relationship such as professor-student, supervisor-subordinate, seller-customer, etc. In such a case, Cook's claim would be reasonable and persuasive. In fact, for this very reason, some people feel uneasy when they converse with a stranger. They feel a continuous burden to establish and re-establish a relationship linguistically with the interlocutor; for them it is much more comfortable and desirable simply to follow a prescribed formula, the attitude which, to use Ide's term, might be referred to as *discernment*.

What is overlooked in Cook's account, then, is the limitation of language utility in terms of constructing a social relationship. *Language by itself cannot establish or overthrow a social relationship when there exists an external and pre-determined relationship.* If one is an advisee and the addressee is his/her advisor, there is a power inequality, and this inequality persists no matter which expression the interlocutors utilize.

Pizziconi (2003: 1497) argues: "the constitution of social identities and affective stances can be carried out via a multitude of typically and non-typically "polite" devices ... but also typically "polite" devices such as honorifics neither uniquely nor directly index politeness."

Although it is valid to say that a one-to-one correspondence does not exist between the use of honorifics and the speaker's polite attitude, it must be recognized that a unidirectional link does exist. That is, while the use of the *masu* form does not necessarily index deference, deference cannot be expressed without the use of the *masu* form. All instances of the plain form in Cook's data confirm this fact. The students' plain forms signal a shift between the dialogue-soliloquy bimodal discourse: they are aware that switching to the plain form in the normal dialogic discourse necessarily disclaims deference. Faced with this dilemma, they temporarily quit the on-going dialogic discourse and switch to soliloquy.

4. Conclusions

This paper has scrutinized Cook's social constructionist account of Japanese politeness, and it has argued that, as her claim stands, it is untenable. Her tenet of fluid social relationships that are constantly constructed and negotiated in social interactions may be valid when interlocutors do not hold clearly established relationships. However, running counter to her claim, her data show that, where the hierarchical relationship is clearly defined, like academic settings, the college and graduate students of her population do not shift to the plain form in dialogic discourse with their professors during their academic consultation sessions. That is, they observe the socially prescribed linguistic norm.

Contrary to Cook's analysis, the incomplete sentences utilized by the students are not ambiguous between the *masu* and the plain-form interpretations; had they been completed, they would all be understood as ending in the *masu* form. Furthermore, all of the students' utterances ending in the plain form are in the soliloquial mode of discourse, not directly addressed to their advisors. The Japanese honorific system does not permit its speakers to express intimacy and deference simulta-

neously. To circumvent this problem, competent speakers make a meta-pragmatic shift from dialogue to soliloquy, revealing their inner thoughts as an indicator of trust and psychological closeness. Unless Cook can provide a clear example to demonstrate that students indeed shift their speech from the *masu* to the plain form in dialogic discourse with their professors in academic consultation, the conclusion that her claim is a hasty generalization is unavoidable.

The construction and maintenance of social relationships are immensely complex. While sociopragmatically competent speakers do not always passively observe prescriptive social norms, they are not free agents as Cook argues. Language is a powerful tool, but language alone cannot negotiate, let alone override, such pre-existing social relationships as that of professor-student. The violation of this social norm can bring disadvantage to the speaker, which is exemplified in various ways in episodes of *tameguchi*.

Bionote

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Notes

1. The basic tenets of Cook's journal article (2006) and her book chapter (2008a) are identical; however, her 2006 version is bolder and clearer. I, therefore, cite in the present paper from the 2006 article in the main.
2. Fukada and Asato (2004) argue that Japan is a "vertical" society, where relative status difference, even very small, counts as significant. Therefore, when the addressee is of higher status, power and/or distance are assigned markedly high values. These high values, in turn, elevate the R value of any act, whether it is intrinsically face-threatening or not.
3. Cook (2008b) points out that the common understanding of *masu* as a marker of politeness or formality cannot account for its full range of utility, e. g., its use by parent to child. She argues that the *masu* form directly indexes a self-presentational stance, defined as an affective stance of displaying one's positive social role to other(s) (*shisei o tadasu* 'to hold oneself up' or *kichin to suru* 'to do something neatly') when one is literally or figuratively "on stage" (2008b: 46). It then indirectly indexes politeness, which is highlighted when used in out-

- group contexts, where polite behavior is expected. By contrast, in the in-group context (e. g., the family), a display of the self-presentational stance foregrounds the speaker's social identities related to responsibilities in the group (pp. 47–48). For instance, parents tend to switch from the plain to the *masu* form when teaching children, doing household chores, and cooking and serving food. Parental practice of how and when to present various social identities through the use of the *masu* form socializes children (2008b: 62).
4. For a brief explanation of these two forms, refer to Cook (2006: 275, 2008a: 11).
 5. *Transition relevance place* (TRP): a point of possible completion of the current utterance in a conversation, so that a transition from one speaker to another is possible.
 6. *Desho(o)* is the tentative form of the copula and morphologically the polite counterpart of *daroo(o)*. However, Cook points out that *daroo(o)* sounds very rough, and it is normally not used by female speakers (2008a: 11). Following Cook, I do not mark *desho(o)* as a *masu* form in this paper.
 7. <http://oshiete1.watch.impress.co.jp/qa2494417.html> [August 12, 2011].
 8. http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xbfxzy_yyyy-yyy_fun [August 12, 2011].
 9. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOT5TCsr9Kg> [August 7, 2011]. Host: Hakase Suidobashi; Guests: Tetsuya Miyazaki (G1), Shinji Miyadai (G2), Hideto Tomabechi (G3).
 10. *Desune* is the polite version of the interjection *ne*. In this case, *desu* is not a predicate, i. e., **sore wa tomokaku desu*.
 11. *M2* is coined after the initial *M* of Miyazaki and Miyadai.
 12. “Co-construction” in the sense of completing another's utterance here should not be confused with the interactional phenomena of “co-constructing” social relationships.
 13. Usami (1995: 31) reports that in her conversation data of nine Japanese speakers unfamiliar with each other, 93.9% of the utterances are in the *masu* style.
 14. As Cook points out, other factors are also involved in the selection of the speech style, e. g., the mode of communication and the formality of the speech situation.
 15. Kamio (1994: 77) explains that a piece of information falls inside an individual's territory if (i) the information is obtained through the speaker's direct experience, (ii) the information is about persons, facts, and things close to the speaker, including information about the speaker's plans, actions, and behavior and information about places to which the speaker has a geographical relation, or (iii) the information falls within the speaker's professional or other expertise.
 16. The use of the sentence-final *yo* here guarantees that the utterance is in the dialogic mode, because, while the particle *ne* occurs very frequently in soliloquy, *yo* rarely occurs in it (Hasegawa 2010: 61).

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